

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Laura Maiolo and I am a resident of Groton. I work as a paraeducator in the Groton School District at Groton Middle School. I offer the following testimony in support of House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators:

Paraeducators are on the front lines of student learning. We provide one-on-one assistance to special education students, reinforce instruction, manage classrooms, and are there for them from the time they arrive off the bus to the time they leave school for the day. We celebrate with our students when they succeed and try to redirect them when they act out verbally and physically.

Despite the important roles we play, paraeducators are among the lowest-paid staff members in our schools. We can't afford our healthcare and there is little chance we can afford to retire with dignity - unless we work a second or third job. We don't get paid during the summer and we can't collect unemployment. At my school alone, at least half a dozen paraeducators have left for better-paying positions during this school year. There is no wonder paraeducators are leaving the profession in droves, leaving more than 1,300 paraeducator positions vacant in districts throughout the state.

HB 6881 is an important step in improving the work-life and career opportunities of Connecticut's paraeducators. But most of all this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity we have earned.

The needs of our classroom have changed. Students need more help in today's classroom than ever before. Paras are being stretched thin to provide the help that's needed. Some of my paraeducator co-workers have three or four students they are working with because of the extreme shortage of paras in our school. Just among my sixth-grade special education resource team alone is a shortage of two paraeducators that is needed for students in the group I work with. I do not have the exact number of para shortages in my building, but I do know that we are several paraeducators short in every grade. Many students go without any para support even though it's stated in their IEP that the student requires a paraeducator.

These students who don't have a para with them are unmotivated and several times cause class disruption because their needs are not being met. In my school district, paraeducator job openings are listed several times a month for multiple schools.

I support my student with encouragement and patience to complete his assignments. I know him well and I know when he's getting discouraged or frustrated with his assignment and can help him go about it in a different way before it escalates further. I assist him with his math, reading and writing. If I'm absent a day, he asks me where I was and he does not have a substitute para with him, which is difficult for him to get his math and writing completed. That school day may be difficult for him. My presence alone helps him through his school day. It's positively impacting my student's day. I am proud to be a paraeducator because I make a difference in my student's education.

Now is the time for this committee and all the members of the General Assembly to take immediate and meaningful action to raise paraeducator pay, lower our healthcare costs, ensure we have meaningful retirement benefits, and give us the tools we need to help students succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Please support student learning by prioritizing paraeducators and passing HB 6881.

Laura Maiolo
Groton, CT